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Preface

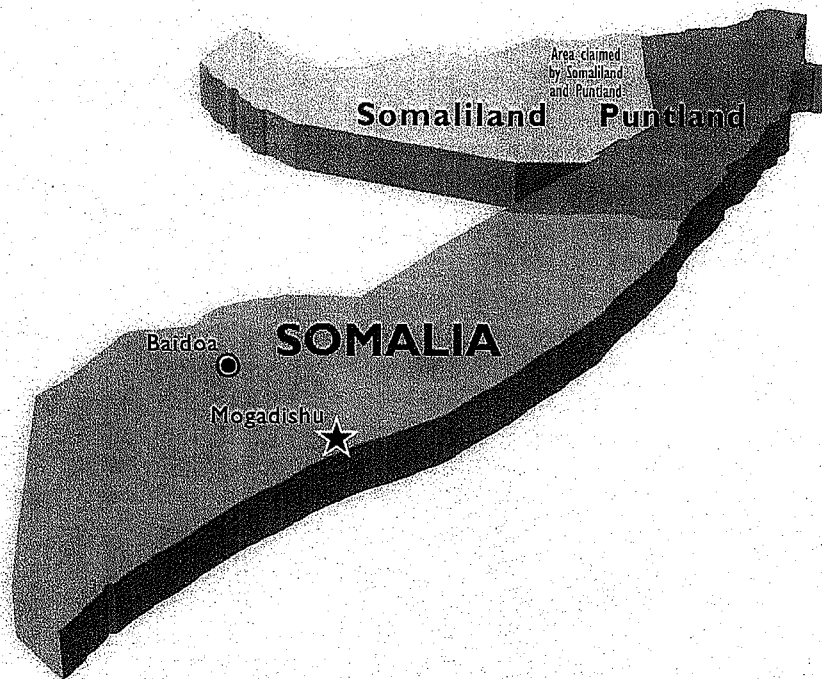
(C//NF) This guide, which provides information on Somalia and the US Somali diaspora, is intended as a tool for law enforcement and government officials to increase cultural awareness and enhance outreach and engagement efforts to Somali American communities in the US. Due to the increase in the size and breadth of the Somali community in the US, there is a critical need to better understand the cultures, traditions, and customs of Somali Americans. As a noted academic states, "Perceptions become realities to the people who hold them, and people who lack cross-cultural experience can easily misunderstand the attitudes and behaviors they confront." This guide serves to equip law enforcement officials with cross-cultural awareness of the Somali American diaspora, so that law enforcement can perform their critical jobs in a more effective manner.

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History

(U) Somalia, located at the Horn of Africa near the Arabian Peninsula, has been a crossroads of civilization for thousands of years. Somalia played an important role in the commerce of ancient Egyptians, and with later Chinese, Greek, and Arab traders.

(U) **18th century:** Somalis develop a culture shaped by pastoral nomadism and adherence to Islam.

(U) **1891-1960:** European powers create five separate Somali entities:

- » British Somaliland (north central).
- » French Somaliland (east and southeast).
- » Italian Somaliland (south).
- » Ethiopian Somaliland (the Ogaden).
- » The Northern Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya.

(U) **1960:** Italian and British colonies merge into the independent Somali Republic.

(U) **1960-1969:** Somalia remains independent and democratic but suffers from territorial disputes with Ethiopia and Kenya and faces difficulty in merging the legacies of Italian and British colonial administrations.

(U) **21 October 1969:** Corruption and a power vacuum in the Somali government culminate in a bloodless coup led by Major General Muhammad Siad Barre.

(U) **1969-1991:** Siad Barre establishes a military dictatorship that divides and oppresses Somalis.

(U) **27 January 1991:** Siad Barre flees Mogadishu, and the Somali state collapses. Armed clan-based militias fight for power.

(U) **1991-1995:** The United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNISOM) I and II—initially a US-led, UN-sanctioned multilateral intervention—attempts to resolve the civil war and provide humanitarian aid. The ambitious UNISOM mandate to rebuild a Somali government threatens warlords' interests and fighting ensues. UN forces depart in 1995, leaving Somalia in a state of violence and anarchy. Nearly 1 million refugees and almost 5 million people risk starvation and disease. Emigration rises sharply.

(U) **Since 1995,** Somali society exists without a state. Clan and family ties provide the main economic support system for individuals. Remittances from the diaspora have been the primary source of income.

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(U) Three political regions emerge: Somalia (south/central region), Puntland (northeast), and Somaliland (northwest).

Recent History

(U) **2004-2006:** The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is established in October 2004 and governs from neighboring Kenya until June 2005. A split among the leadership develops in 2005, paralyzing the political process. In an attempt to resolve their differences, leaders in the TFG convene the first session of the Transitional Federal Parliament in Baidoa, Somalia on 26 February 2006.

(U) **June 2006:** A loose coalition of Muslim clerics, local leaders, and militias known as the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) secures control of Mogadishu followed by most of southern Somalia; a semblance of law and order reemerges. Islamist hardliners in the CIC begin to vie for power.

(U) **December 2006:** The UN Security Council—with US sponsorship—authorizes an African peacekeeping mission to protect the TFG and maintain security in Baidoa. Militants associated with the CIC say they will treat any foreign forces as invaders. As CIC militias advance on Baidoa, the TFG requests the assistance of the Ethiopian military and launches a major military offensive, which routs the CIC. Longstanding animosity toward Ethiopia inspires deadly insurgent and counterinsurgent movements.

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(U) **2007:** Al-Shabaab emerges as an independent force and the main source of resistance to Ethiopian forces, although it is internally divided.

(U) **February 2008:** The US Department of State lists al-Shabaab as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist organization.

(U) **Summer 2008:** Moderates in the TFG and the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (a coalition of Islamists representing the opposition) sign the Djibouti Agreement, which calls for the cessation of armed confrontation. The peace pact also calls for the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia.

(U) **January 2009:** Ethiopia withdraws, and Sharif Sheikh Ahmad is elected president of Somalia. Al-Shabaab takes over Baidoa.

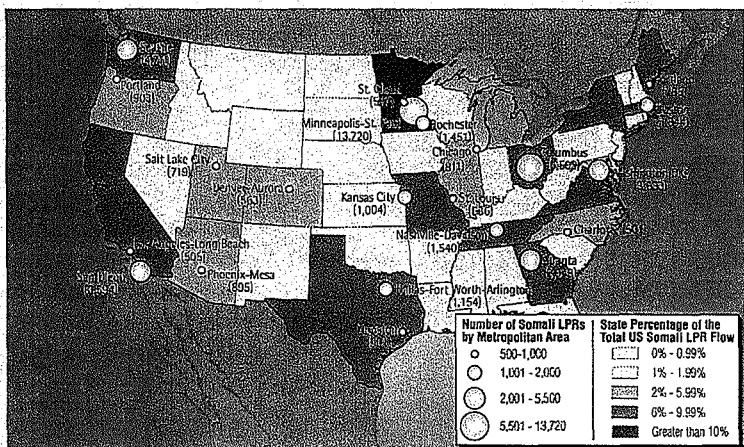
(U) **Currently,** the UN estimates that 3 million people are in need of immediate emergency relief. There are close to 1 million internally displaced persons in Somalia. Refugee flows primarily to Kenya and Yemen continue, as fighting between the TFG and al-Shabaab continues.



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Key Findings:

- Legal Permanent Residents (LPR), also known as Green Card holders, are foreign nationals who have been granted the right to reside permanently in the US.
- The top five states of residence for Somali LPRs from 1990 through 2007 were Minnesota, Ohio, California, Washington, and Virginia.
- The top five metropolitan areas of residence for Somali LPRs from 1990 through 2007 were Minneapolis-St. Paul, Columbus, Seattle, Washington DC, and San Diego.

NOTE: The numbers shown in this graphic identify the total number of ethnic Somalis (those individuals whose nationality, country of birth, or country of last residence is Somalia) who were granted legal permanent resident (LPR) status by the US Government from Fiscal Year 1990 to 2007, but do not fully represent the total ethnic Somali population in the US. 2009 estimates approximate the ethnic Somali population of the US at 150,000 to 200,000 individuals. The numbers do not capture children born in the US to ethnic Somalis, pre-existing Somali communities before 1990, or recent refugees and asylees that have not yet adjusted to LPR status.

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US Somali Diaspora

(U//FOUO) Somalia has become a “diasporized” nation. An estimated 1 million Somalis have fled the country since the late 1980s. Somalis now live in almost every country in the world, usually as lawful immigrants or refugees, but sometimes as illegals. The vast majority of Somali Americans are new immigrants who were resettled in the US as refugees beginning in 1992. In general, Somali Americans’ literacy rates and English language skills are among the lowest of recent immigrants, as educational and employment opportunities were considerably limited in Somalia and in refugee camps. Despite significant challenges, such as high poverty rates, linguistic isolation, and pressures to provide an economic lifeline to family in Somalia, Somali American communities are adapting to American society, exercising their voting and religious rights, organizing themselves, and attaining education at all levels. Prominent Somali immigrants include elected officials, university professors, reporters, hip-hop artists, and supermodels.

» The majority of Somalis arrived in the US in the last two decades, with immigration peaking in 2004.

- » Somalis are the largest African refugee group in the US and have constituted one of the largest portions of all refugee arrivals in the past several years.
- » The US has one of the largest Somali communities outside Africa. The majority of displaced Somalis remain in areas bordering the conflict.
- » The US Somali community accounts for between 5 and 10 percent of the US Muslim population.
- » Somali settlement in the US is based on several factors, including initial placement by refugee resettlement agencies, the availability of employment opportunities and government-sponsored social services, and—perhaps most important—the feedback of extended family members and friends living in these cities.

Clan

(U) Somali society is organized primarily through familial and clan affiliations. This social structure originated before the arrival of Islam. The five major clan families in Somalia are Darood, Hawiye, Isaaq, Digil-Rahanweyn, and Dir, along with the minority clans Bantu, Barawans, and Bajuni. Within each of these clans, there are many subclans and sub-subclans. (See Appendix).

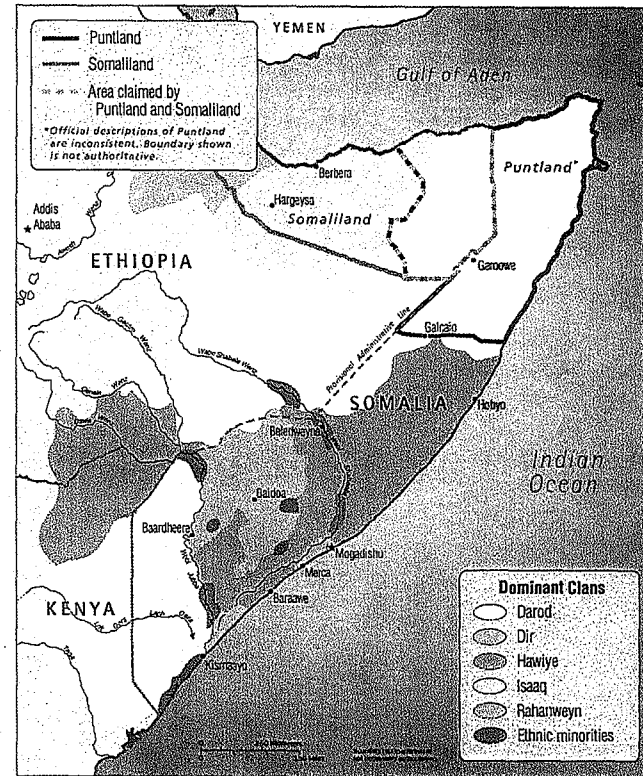
(U) Clans are organized into a quasi-caste system of "majority" or "noble" clans and minority clans, the latter of which comprise about 20 percent of the population. ("Noble" refers to the widespread Somali belief that members of the major clans descended from a common Somali ancestor.)

(U) The central government has been largely ineffective in preventing violence in Somalia over the past 30 years; during some periods it was the primary perpetrator of violence. In this void, clans and families have become a primary source of security for Somalis. As a result, smaller minority clans have been particularly exposed to discrimination and violence.

(U) Clan association is distinct from familial association, although clan identity is developed and cemented by marriage and lineage. The clan system in Somalia is dynamic in that it reflects both political and demographic developments and can result in the creation of new offshoots, identities, and alliances. It has been a divisive and destructive force when manipulated for economic and political gain, but in the absence of a state structure in Somalia the clan system has been virtually the only source of security and protection.

(U//FOUO) Clan affiliations remain very important to Somalis, particularly as a socioeconomic support system. Moreover, clan distinctions, discrimination, and alliances may be repeated in the US. Clan and familial ties exert emotional pressure on many Somali Americans, particularly with respect to obligation, responsibility, and the sense of honor associated with belonging to a given clan. The relevance of this institution, however, may decrease as time passes in the US. Factors contributing to this dilution include community members joining civic organizations, conducting business across clans, and sharing similar challenges of life in the diaspora regardless of clan origin.

Somalia's Clan Boundaries



Islamic Traditions

(U) Scholars have had difficulty establishing the historical progression of Islam in Somalia due to Somalis' oral tradition and lack of official records. Most Somalis believe that Islam spread to Somalia in the 7th century A.D., during the life of the prophet Muhammad, though most scholars point to a later and gradual progression of Islam in Somalia over a period of centuries. Somalis have over time adapted their cultural practices to comply with traditional forms of Sunni Islam, though many tribal and African traditions remain. As a result, dress, food, diet, and daily interactions normally adhere to the classical tenets of Islam as well as indigenous Somali culture.

(U) Most Somali Muslims follow the mystical tradition of Islam, Sufism, through three main Sufi brotherhoods or orders: the Qadiriyyah, the Ahmadiyah-Idrisiyyah, and the Salihiyah.

(U) In recent years, Salafism—a form of Islam that interprets the religion more rigidly than other schools—has been on

the rise in Somalia. Salafism has both moderate practitioners and followers who adhere to more austere interpretations. Salafis hold that true practice of Islam must be in its original and uncorrupted form without the innovations (*bid'ah*) that they believe occurred after the death of the Prophet and his companions. This form of Islamic belief is becoming more prevalent in the US Somali diaspora as well, according to leading Somali scholars.

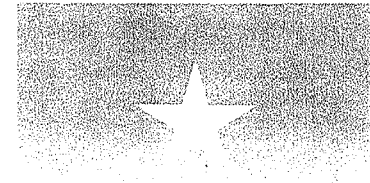
(U) Five Pillars of Islam

1. *Shahadah*: The Declaration of Faith ("There is no God but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet.")
2. *Salat*: Prayer (conducted at five prescribed times throughout each day).
3. *Zakat*: Giving charity, alms.
4. *Sawn*: Fasting (refraining from eating, drinking, and having sex from sunrise to sunset throughout the holy month of Ramadan).
5. *Haji*: The Pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia (to be conducted at least once in a lifetime).

(U) Islamic and Somali Religious Practices

1. **Daily Prayers:** Part of the Five Pillars of Islam. Devout Muslims perform these rituals before dawn, at midday, in midafternoon, at sunset, and at night. Muslims use water to cleanse the hands, face, head, mouth, and feet in ritual ablutions conducted before prayer.
2. **Friday Prayers:** Group prayer services occur in mosques at midafternoon each Friday; much like Sunday church services, Muslims generally listen to a sermon and also perform prayers.
3. **Holidays:** Two major holidays are recognized within Sunni Islam: *Eid al Fitr* and *Eid al Adha*. *Eid al Fitr* (literally, holiday of the breaking of the fast) is associated with the end of Ramadan. *Eid al Adha* (the holiday of the sacrifice) celebrates the sacrifice that Abraham was willing to make by offering his son to God.

Flag



(U) The blue base originates from the flag of the United Nations in reflection of the role that the UN played in assisting Somalia to independence. A white star was chosen as the national symbol, each of its five points referring to the five historical regions inhabited by the Somali people: Italian Somaliland (Somalia), British Somaliland (Somalia), French Somaliland (Djibouti), the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, and northeastern Kenya. For some Somalis, the flag further symbolizes pan-Somalism, the vision of unifying these territories under one Somali flag and nation. The pursuit of this goal has led to conflict, with Somalia supporting Somali insurgents in the so-called Shifita War against Kenya from 1963-1967 and engaging in armed conflict with Ethiopia over the Ogaden region since 1977.

Cultural Customs

(U) Clothing and Appearance

(U) Traditional Somali dress comes in many styles, varying by region of origin. Traditional Somali dress is influenced by the desert climate and Islamic values. Western dress is common in urban areas of Somalia and in the diaspora. Traditional Somali dress often consists of:

For Females:

- » *Dira'a*: a long billowing dress, worn over a petticoat or a slip.
- » *Coantino*: a four-yard cloth tied over the shoulder and draped around the waist.
- » *Toob*: long dress or robe outfit that fully covers the body from shoulder to ankle.
- » *Hijab* or head scarf that covers the hair.

For Males:

- » *Maawis*: traditional kilt-like garment (In the US, it is usually worn in the home or to sleep).
- » *Kofiyah*: head covering (in the shape of a cap).

(U) Henna is used as a dye to paint designs on women's hands or feet, generally for special occasions, like weddings. Men also may use henna to dye their hair and beards, sometimes to denote tribal leadership.

(U) Gestures

(U) Somalis often use sweeping hand and arm gestures to dramatize speech. Nonverbal gestures have varied meanings, such as:

- » Use of the index finger to point is not acceptable and may indicate contempt.

- » Snapping fingers may mean "long ago" or "so on."
- » A thumb under the chin may indicate a full stomach.
- » A swift twist of the open hand means "nothing" or "no."

(U) Greetings

(U) A common Somali greeting is *Assalam Alaikum* (peace be with you) and—when greeters are of the same gender—a gentle handshake. Somalis often observe

the traditional Muslim practice of dressing modestly and limiting physical interaction, e.g., shaking hands, between unrelated members of the opposite sex.

(U) Common greetings are:

- » *Subah Wanaagsan* — Good morning.
- » *Galab Wanaagsan* — Good afternoon.
- » *Habib Wanaagsan* — Good night.
- » *Iska Warran* — Hello/How are you?
- » *Nabad Miyaa* — Are you in peace?



Common Words and Phrases

<i>qat (khat)</i>	native plant chewed as a stimulant
<i>dua</i>	supplication (to pray to God)
<i>abba</i>	father
<i>hooyo</i>	mother
<i>garaad</i>	chief
<i>wadaad</i>	religious man
<i>wadaado</i>	religious men
<i>qoys</i>	families
<i>wiil</i>	a boy
<i>gabar</i>	a girl
<i>halal</i>	Arabic word meaning legitimate or virtuous
<i>malakh</i>	from the Arabic word malik, meaning master or king. May also refer to the head of a clan.
<i>Jumma</i>	Friday, the day of assembly and congregation in Islam
<i>fadlan</i>	please
<i>mahadsanid</i>	thank you
<i>magacaa?</i>	What is your name?

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(U) When Interacting with Somalis...

(U) Do This:

- » Learn key phrases for ice-breaking.
- » Treat elderly Somalis with respect and deference.
- » Thank your host for his or her hospitality and good conversation. Plan to return the hospitality.
- » Extend your right hand to greet Somali males, but don't shake hands with opposite sex unless they initiate.

(U) Avoid This:

- » Being alarmed if Somalis, especially females, do not maintain eye contact, as looking someone in the eye may be considered rude and immodest.
- » Crossing your legs; it is impolite and may convey arrogance because it was used by tribes and clans to indicate wealth and power.
- » Putting your hands in your pockets during conversation.
- » Showing the soles of your feet as it is considered impolite and insulting to many Muslims.
- » Using the "thumbs up" gesture as it is considered obscene.

(U) Naming Conventions

(U) The Somali system of naming is different from the Western system. Naming conventions among Somalis do not include the use of surnames. Instead, Somalis typically use three names:

first name (individual)
 +
father's name
 +
grandfather's name

(U) These names can be used interchangeably. This may include appearing in a different order on various forms of identification. First and middle names are generally used for identification rather than first and last, which may lead to some confusion in the US. Many Somali males have nicknames that sometimes have special meaning. It is helpful to ask Somali males, "What do your friends call you?" Women generally do not change their names at marriage. As a result, husbands, wives, and children may have different last names.

(U) Time

(U) Some Somalis may not be able to tell you precisely how old they are. Birthdays typically are not celebrated and have often gone unrecorded in Somalia. Traditionally, Somalis organized their activities according to the season, the time of day, and the duties of Islam. Relationships are valued over punctuality, and the importance of time differs from Western culture. Outreach efforts should take Somali Americans' sense of time into account for scheduling purposes.

Language

(U) The universal language in Somalia is Somali. Arabic is the second-most commonly spoken language due to Somalia's close geographic, cultural, and religious links to Arab countries. Somalis who have attained formal education or traveled abroad may also speak English, French, Italian, Russian, or Swahili.

(U) Spelling and Pronunciation

(U) The Somali language was purely oral until the written script was introduced in 1972 and adopted as the official written language of government. Oral communication continues to be the predominant form of communications in Somalia, and Somalis are not universally fluent in writing Somali, so grammatical rules are somewhat fluid. The written Somali language uses the Latin alphabet. Consonants in Somali are similar to those in English except that:

(U) X, Q, C, Dh, and KH, are used to represent special consonant sounds in Somali that do not have English equivalents. The Kh is similar to the kh in 'khakhi' and 'khan.' The Q is pronounced like a 'K' and may be spelled that way, for example *khat* or *qat*.

The X is a more emphatic version of 'h' and the two letters can be used interchangeably in words. The C is often silent. For example, the conventional Anglicized spelling of the proper names *Ali* and *Hassan* would be written as *Cali* and *Xasan* in Somali.

J is always pronounced as j in 'jet'.

G is always pronounced g as in 'get.'

(U) The Somali language has no P, no V, and no Z, so when Somalis speak English they will often substitute the sounds b, f, and s respectively; the English 'p' sound is particularly difficult for Somali speakers.

(U) The Somali language has 5 short vowels, represented by a, e, i, o, u, and long vowels represented by a doubling of vowel letters: aa, ee, ii, oo, and uu.

a as in *pat* if short (a) but as in *father* if long (aa).

e as in *pet* if short (e) but as in *paid* if long (ee).

i as in *sit* if short (i) but as in *seat* if long (ii).

o as in *cot* if short (o) but as in *coat* if long (oo).

u as in *put* if short (u) but as in *shoot* if long (uu).

(U) The Somali phonetic spelling of the English words *law*, *feet*, and *care* would be 'loo', 'fiit', and 'keer', respectively.

* Part of this material was adapted from *Somali Canadians Today*, an online news and cultural magazine, and taken originally from the booklet: *Somali Study Materials*, Reference material for teachers, by Anita Suleiman.



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Legal Issues

(U) Khat

(U) Many Somalis use khat (a.k.a. qat), a shrub native to East Africa that when chewed at its peak strength is a strong stimulant. Its use is widely accepted among Somali Americans as a cultural habit, but the US Government labels khat a narcotic, possession of which is subject to prosecution.

- » Street terms: Abyssinian tea, African salad, Oat, Kat, Chat, and Chatha.
- » Khat typically is 'chewed like tobacco though it also can be smoked and even sprinkled on food.
- » Khat is legal in much of Europe, East Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula; several million people worldwide are estimated to use khat.
- » Khat is frequently shipped in bundles and packaged to retain moisture and freshness and generally is smuggled in passenger luggage, overnight express mail, or shipped as air cargo and may be labeled misleadingly as "vegetables."

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(U) Money Movement Overseas

(U//FOUO) Somali Americans often send a portion of their earnings (defined as remittances) to their families in Somalia. Sending remittances to Somalia is legal and vital to the country's economy. One of the most common means for Somali Americans to send remittances is through an informal value transfer system (IVTS) or *hawala*—written *xawaala* in Somali. Because Somalia lacks an efficient central banking system, money is frequently sent to Somalia through hawalas. Hawalas are popular among Somali Americans because they are often safer, faster, cheaper, and more reliable than other methods of remitting funds and may be the only method available to remit funds to specific regions of Somalia.

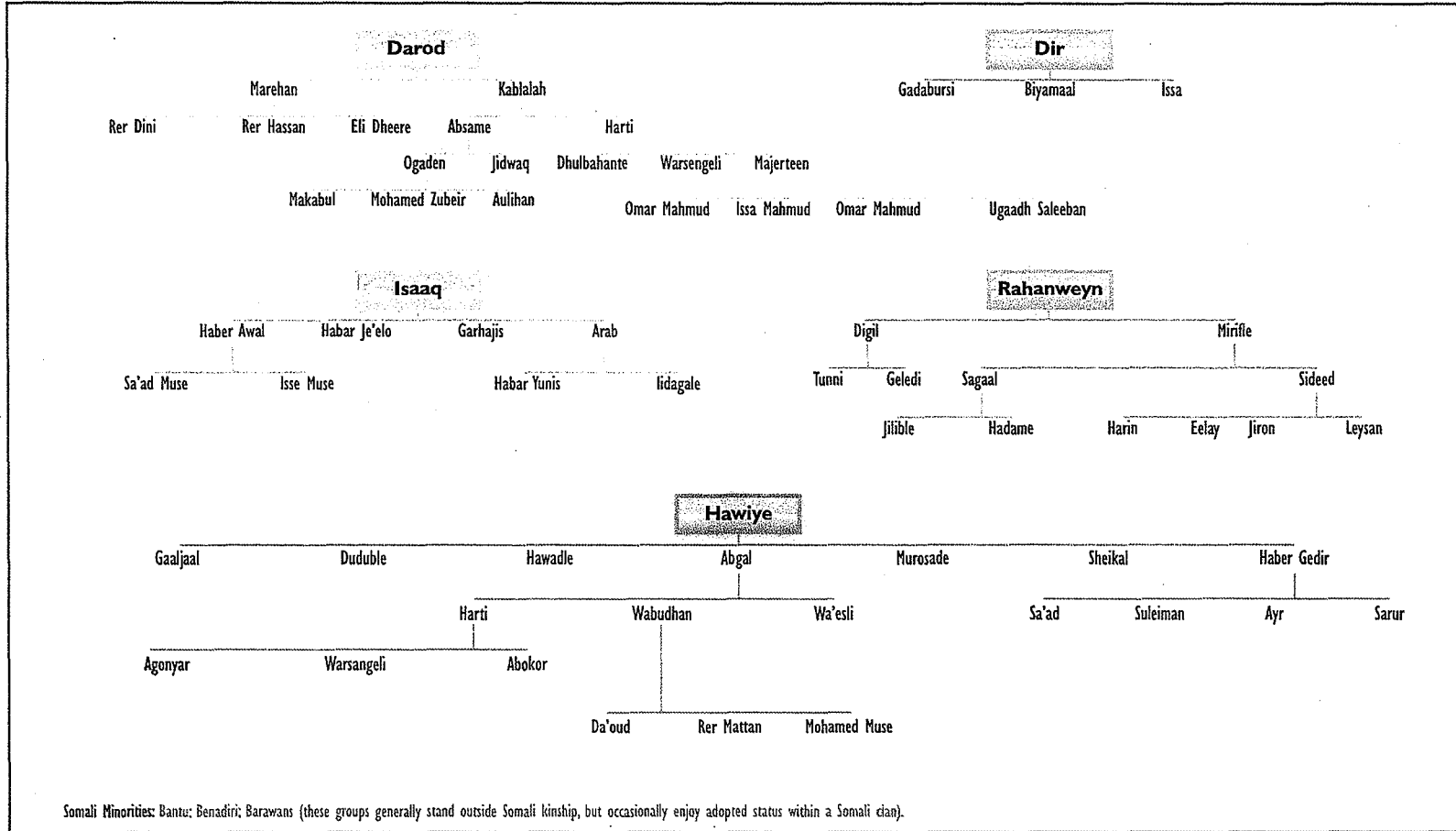
(U) Hawalas are often referred to as an 'underground' banking system, but this term is not always correct. The components of hawala that distinguish it from other remittance systems are trust and the extensive use of connections such as family relationships or regional affiliations. Hawalas can operate in the open with complete legitimacy if they comply with the Bank Secrecy Act (BSA) and all other applicable laws, and many hawalas do so.

(U) Under the BSA, hawalas are required to register with the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN), a bureau of the Department of the Treasury, as Money Services Businesses (MSBs). In addition, hawalas, like all other MSBs, must retain certain types of records, report suspicious financial activities to FinCEN by filing Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs), maintain an Anti-Money Laundering Program (AML), and meet other regulatory requirements. Numerous MSBs that publicly advertise remittance services to Somalia and other nations, including hawalas, have registered with FinCEN.

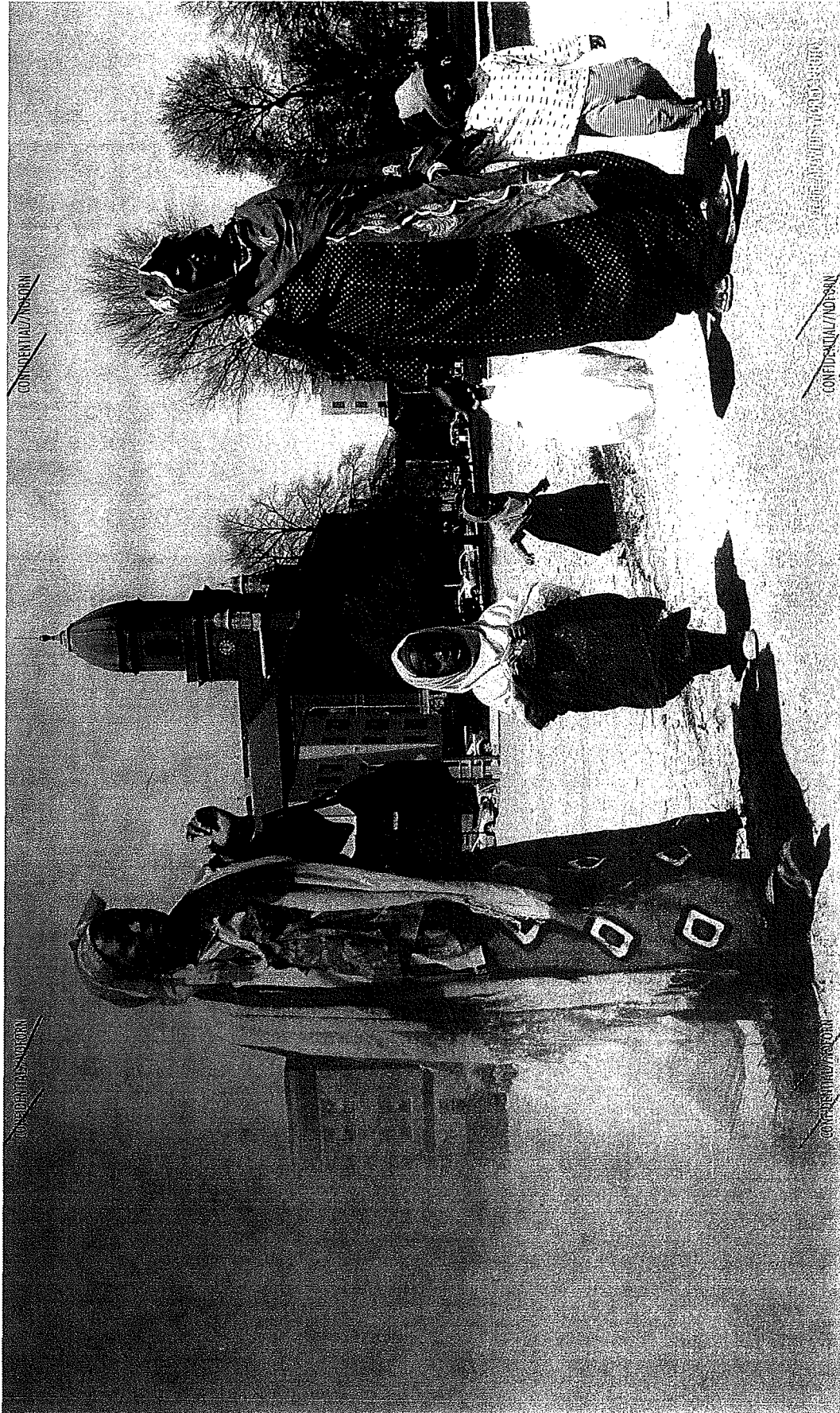
(U//FOUO) While the great majority of funds that are remitted through hawalas to Somalia may be perfectly legitimate, criminals can misuse hawalas—in particular hawalas that do not comply with federal regulations—for moving and/or laundering illicit proceeds. In some cases, depository institutions, where such hawalas may maintain operating accounts, file SARs that detail suspicious transactions by hawalas. SARs and other BSA reports filed by financial institutions are thus extremely valuable to law enforcement officials investigating transactions conducted by or through hawalas, particularly unregistered or otherwise illegal hawalas.

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Appendix

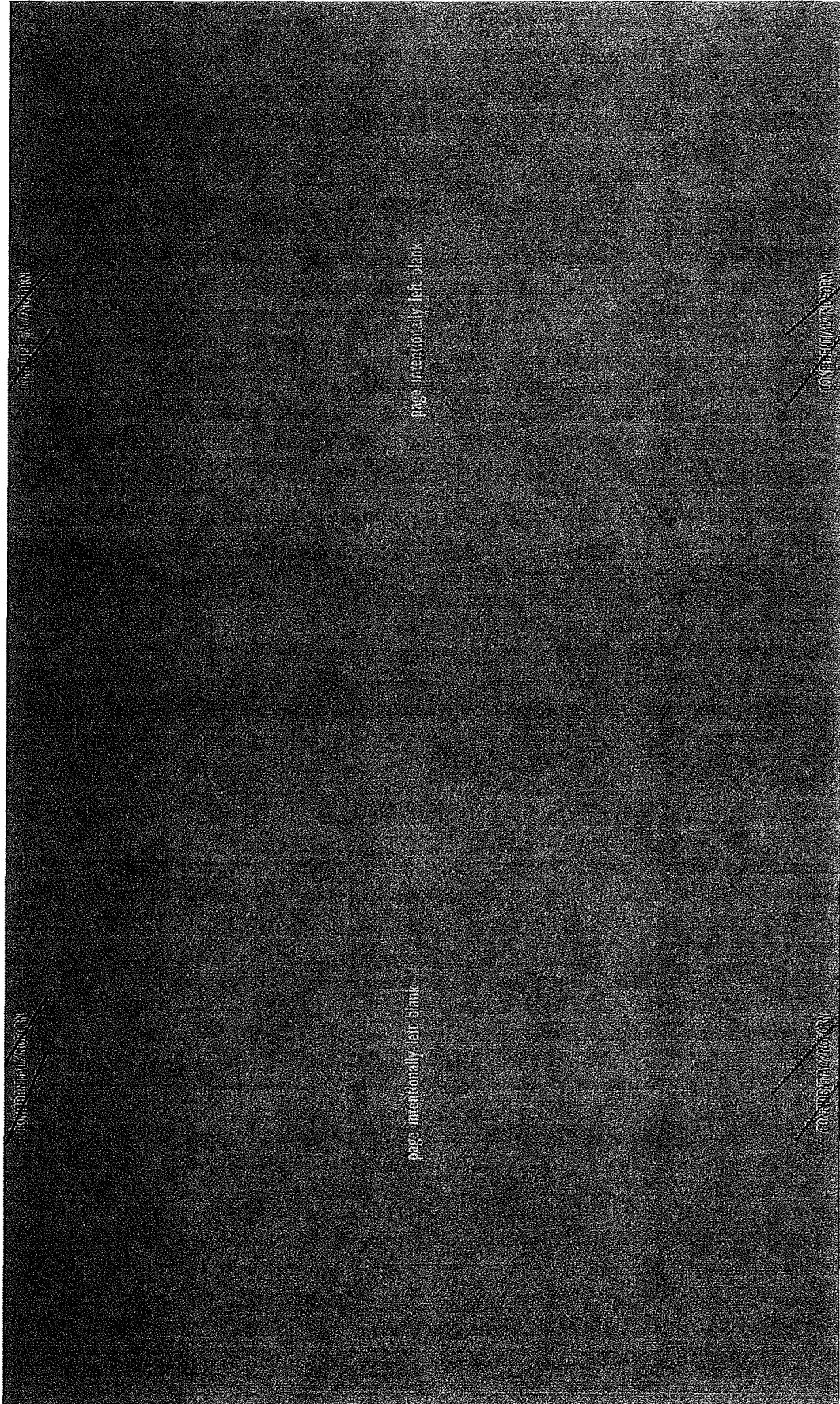


Somali Minorities: Bantu; Benadiri; Barawans (these groups generally stand outside Somali kinship, but occasionally enjoy adopted status within a Somali clan).



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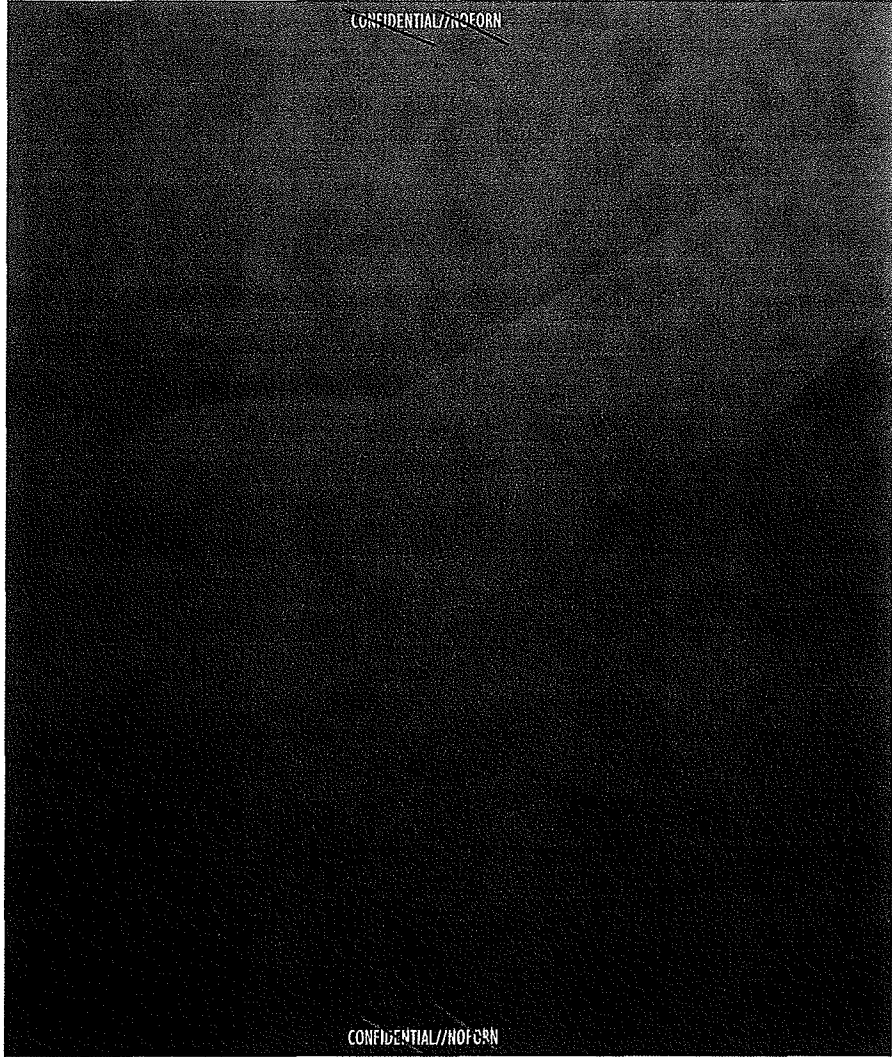
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